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ABSTRACT

The academic performance of intercollegiate athletes at the University of California (UC), Davis, was studied, using graduation rates and grade point average (GPA) as performance measures. Comparisons of academic performance of athletes and other UC Davis undergraduates were also made. Of 1,042 male athletes during 1970-1979, 63 percent were regular admission students, 13 percent were special admission students (had not met the university's admission requirements), and 24 percent were unclassified. It was found that graduation rates of the athletes were high. Of the regularly admitted athletes during 1968-1973, 79 percent graduated, compared to 62-66 percent of regularly-admitted male students who were not athletes. For specially-admitted students, 57 percent of male athletes graduated during the 6-year period, compared to 39 percent of male nonathletes. At the end of 2 years of college work, cumulative GPAs of the intercollegiate athletes were comparable to those of male students in general. Among the specially-admitted males, athletes had slightly higher grades than male students in general. Three sports had high percentages of specially-admitted students: football, basketball, and baseball. (Author/SW)

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ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

University of California, Davis

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Bonnie MacKenzie
Office of Student Affairs
Research & Information
September 1981

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The value of an athletes's college education has been a popular and important topic of discussion by both media and college administrators. This report provides an academic performance profile of UC Davis intercollegiate athletes, using graduation rates and GPA as the measures of performance. In addition, academic performance comparisons between athletes and other UC Davis undergraduates are presented in the report.

A total of 1042 students were identified as male athletes during the period of 1970-1979. Of these 1042 students, 13% were special action admissions (136 students), 63% were regular admission (667 students), and 24% were unclassified (i.e., cases where the actual admission category was missing in the student's record on the Composite Undergraduate File--246 students). The results of the study indicate the following:

1) Graduation rates of intercollegiate male athletes are high. Of the regularly admitted males entering UC Davis from high school between 1968 and 1973 who subsequently played in intercollegiate competiton, 79% graduated. [This figure is higher than for male students as a whole (68%), which would be expected because students who join intercollegiate teams are typically already in their 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year of college, i.e., they are a select group more likely to graduate than the total group of students entering from high school.]
2) At the end of two years of college work, cumulative GPAs of intercollegiate male athletes admitted from high school were comparable to those of male students in general. Among regularly admitted students, 93% of athletes and 95% of male students had a C average or better. Among special action admits, athletes had slightly higher grades than men in general: 82% of athletes had C averages or better, compared to only 76% of men in general. Thus, second-year cumulative GPA comparisons (which involve comparable groups persisting through the time of highest dropout risk) indicate that academic performance is essentially the same for male athletes as for men in general.
3) Three sports have high percentages of special action students: Football, Basketball and Baseball.
4) In six of the seven sports examined, there has been no significant increase during the period studied in the proportion of entering students who are special action. There has been an increase in entering Football players who are special action, but this is based on very small groups and does not represent a uniform increase in absolute numbers.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

This report examines the academic characteristics and UC Davis academic performance of male athletes on intercollegiate teams of 1970-1979. Indicators of academic performance used are graduation rates and UCD GPA's. The central question of the study is: Do athletes do as well (or better) academically as other UC Davis undergraduates?

STUDY POPULATION. The study population was determined by the data collection procedures of a graduate student doing a Master's project on Davis intercollegiate athletes. Athlete names, student numbers, and team and year of participation were drawn from 1970-1979 Physical Education Department lists used to report a year of sports eligibility to the Far Western Conference. The sports examined were Football, Baseball, Basketball, Soccer, Golf, Water Polo, and Cross Country.

The data were collected for both varsity and junior varsity players, but not for all sports. The student researcher made several efforts to delete names of athletes who played on junior varsity teams only. The success of these efforts varied with the team involved: Golf and Cross Country do not have a varsity/junior varsity division, so the entire sports program is represented for these teams. Baseball data represent varsity and junior varsity players, except for 1976-1977 data, which include only varsity players (Of course, varsity Football and Water Polo players may also have been on a junior varsity team during some years, but they are not shown in the data for those years.) Soccer and Basketball may include some participants who were only junior varsity because of difficulties in identifying junior varsity participants on eligibility lists.

Accordingly, the data essentially represent a sample of intercollegiate athletes, containing all varsity and some junior varsity players. When Research and Evaluation took interest in this project, it seemed infeasible to expand or limit the sample because of the considerable cross-matching required with Physical Education Department records. The data, while not definitionally pure, nonetheless seem useful in providing some information about the academic performance of UC Davis intercollegiate athletes.

METHOD. The academic histories and demographic characteristics of athletes were abstracted from the Composite Undergraduate File (CUF). Of the 1045 student names provided Research and Evaluation, three who could not be found

on CUF were omitted. The remaining 1042 students represent 1879 team memberships, allowing for participation in multiple years or (to a limited extent) participation on more than one team.

ATHLETE CHARACTERISTICS. The incidence of special action students varied considerably by type of sport. In the years 1970-1979 combined, the data show that Football players were 22% special action, Basketball--21%, Baseball--13%, Soccer--7%, Golf--7%, Cross Country--5%, and Water Polo--4%. Because 4-6% of entering UC Davis undergraduates in a given year are typically special action, it seems clear that some intercollegiate sports attract a significant proportion of special action students. It is not possible to tell from CUF whether these students were admitted as special action athletes or whether they were admitted under one of the other special action categories (e.g. disadvantaged, other special talents such as musical ability, veteran). Of all athletes studied, 13% were special action, 63% were regularly admitted, and 24% were unclassified (missing basis-of-admission data is a problem before 1975).

In six of the seven sports examined, no increase occurred during the period studied in the proportion of entering students who are special action. There has been an increase in the percent of entering Football players who are special action, but this increase is based on very small groups and does not represent a uniform increase in numbers. For the years studied, the following proportions of entering students who later became football players occurred: 6 of 9 entering players were special action (1978), 11 of 23 (1977), 14 of 40 (1976), 10 of 31 (1975), and 4 of 25 (1974). These figures do not indicate what proportion of the Football team in a given year was special action; rather they reflect entering cohorts whose members later played on varsity (or junior varsity) teams.

EOP and ethnic minority students each comprised 10% of all athletes studied. The largest minority groups were Blacks--4.8% (50 athletes) and Chicano/Latino--3.5% (36 athletes). EOP students typically comprise 11% of undergraduates, Blacks 3%, and Chicano/Latinos 4%; these groups appear among athletes in roughly the same numbers as they appear in the undergraduate population.

GRADUATION RATES. Two methods of analyzing graduation rates were used: (1) Athletes admitted from high school were numerous enough to allow separate comparison of their graduation rates with the four, five, and six year graduation

rates of all UC Davis high school admits. There were not enough junior transfer athletes in the study population to permit a separate analysis of junior transfers. (2) Graduation rates of athletes, regardless of entering class level, are presented without a UC Davis comparison group. Caution should be used in comparing these figures to any other college or University graduation rates because the mixture of entering class levels makes the data very loose analytically. The rates as presented have face value interest but are very dependent on the selection of the study population as discussed below.

1. HIGH SCHOOL ADMITS. Table 1 shows the four, five and six year graduation rates for athletes admitted from high school. Six year graduation rates ranged from 69% for Water Polo to 94% for Basketball. (Note: these rates are computed using small n's.) For athletes as a group, the six year graduation rate was 79%.

For both regular and special action students and for all sports, graduation rates of athletes admitted from high school were substantially higher than rates for all UC Davis male (and female) undergraduates. For instance, 62-66% of regularly admitted male undergraduates from high school graduate within six years, whereas 79% of regularly admitted athletes graduate. Among special action students, the comparison figures are 39% of male undergraduates and 57% of male athletes graduating within six years. (These data are for 1968-1973 entering high school admits. See Appendix A for graduation rates by sex for high school admits in general.) Among special action Football players, graduation rates were extremely high: they were comparable to those of regularly admitted UCD students.

2. ALL ATHLETES, REGARDLESS OF ENTERING CLASS LEVEL. Table 2 shows graduation rates of all athletes by sport, regardless of their entering class level. The first row of the table shows graduation rates and the second row shows graduation-or-still-enrolled rates. Both measures are higher than typical University graduation rates. Special action Football players were, as in the previous table, far more likely to graduate than special action students in general. Sixty-six percent of special action Football players graduated, a rate comparable to that of regularly admitted students in general.

The sample used for this study is one for which high graduation rates would be expected. Varsity team members have already persisted a year or two in college and are therefore more likely to graduate than are, say, a typical group of freshmen. Thus, in some sense the high graduation rates are an

TABLE 1

GRADUATION RATE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

(High School Admits Fall 1968-Fall 1973)

-By Sport-

A. Regular Admits

Graduated Within	Foot-ball (n=85)	Base-ball (n=53)	Basket-ball (n=18)	Cross Country (n=43)	Water Polo (n=26)	Golf (n=26)	Soccer (n=66)	Total (n=327)
	- Percent Graduated -							
4 years	44	37	39	49	35	42	30	39
5 years	75	67	83	81	62	81	62	72
6 years	81	71	94	84	69	88	73	79

B. Special Action Admits - Football was the only team with enough special action students (n=16) entering F68-73 from high school to permit separate analysis. The graduation rate was 13% within 4 years, 63% within 5 years, and 63% within 6 years.

For all teams combined, the graduation rate of special action students were 25%, 54% and 57% within 4, 5, and 6 years respectively.

TABLE 2

GRADUATION RATES OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

(Includes students entering at all class levels)

-By Sport-

A. Regular Admits

	Foot-ball (n=235)	Base-ball (n=163)	Basket-ball (n=55)	Cross Country (n=119)	Water Polo (n=80)	Golf (n=51)	Soccer (n=202)
Percent Graduated F67-S75 entrants	85	76	92	89	83	80	80
Percent Graduated or Still Enrolled F75-F79 entrants	74	76	76	76	82	80	71

B. Special Action Admits - Football was the only sport with enough special action students (n=68) to permit separate analysis. The graduation rate of F67-S75 entrants was 66%. The graduated-or-still-enrolled rate of F75-F79 entrants was 71%.

artifact of the data. In another sense, however, the graduation rates may be causally related to athletic participation. Research literature on student retention indicates that students who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to persist in college. Thus, varsity athletes may have persisted in the first place because they had interest in continuing athletic participation. The present data do not really address this possibility; they simply indicate that graduation rates of these intercollegiate athletes are very good.

UCD GPA OF HIGH SCHOOL ADMITS. Table 3 compares the UC Davis GPAs of both atletes and male undergraduates who were admitted from high school. No differences exist that seem large in a practical sense. For special action students, the results parallel those found in connection with graduation rates: special action athletes have somewhat better UC Davis GPAs than special action undergraduates as a whole. Note that the GPA analysis does not suffer to the same extent from selection bias as does the graduation analysis because cumulative GPAs are computed only for students (both athletes) and others) who persist.

Examination of GPA data of high school admits by sport shows that there has been no systematic change over the years. For example, Football players' 3rd quarter GPAs are just as good for recent entering classes as they were for entering classes of several years ago. This pattern holds true for both regularly admitted and special action students. As for undergraduates as a whole, special action athletes do not do as well academically as regularly admitted athletes.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Three sports (Football, Basketball and Baseball) have high proportions of special action students, but other sports do not.

2. Academic performance of intercollegiate athletes is very good. Special action athletes have academic records that in some cases are as good as those of regularly admitted students.

3. Further study might examine that group of athletes who were admitted under special action specifically as athletes. Questions of interest would include: Is the high percentage of special action in some sports the result

TABLE 3

UC DAVIS GPA AFTER 1ST, 3RD, AND 6TH QUARTER

Intercollegiate Athletes and Male High School Admits 1974-1977

A. Regularly Admitted Students

Category	UCD GPA AFTER:								
	1st Quarter			3rd Quarter			6th Quarter		
	n	Mean GPA	%≥2.0	n	Mean GPA	%≥2.0	n	Mean GPA	%≥2.0
All Athletes	220	2.61	83	212	2.68	92	186	2.75	93
Baseball	40	2.55	82	39	2.68	89	32	2.80	93
Soccer	72	2.72	83	68	2.77	94	62	2.80	91
Football	52	2.40	78	50	2.51	88	42	2.61	92
Cross Country	30	2.83	93	29	2.69	96	25	2.80	96
Water Polo	20	2.12	70	20	2.47	85	20	2.50	85
All UCD Males	3875	2.69	83	3674	2.77	89	3041	2.89	95

B. Special Action Students

Category	UCD GPA AFTER:								
	1st Quarter			3rd Quarter			6th Quarter		
	n	Mean GPA	%≥2.0	n	Mean GPA	%≥2.0	n	Mean GPA	%≥2.0
All Athletes	38	2.12	57	37	2.27	83	29	2.34	82
Football	24	2.04	62	23	2.27	82	19	2.37	84
All UCD Males	263	1.96	55	226	2.16	64	150	2.33	76

of athletic recruitment or some other factors? What percent of special action students are special action athletes? As a subgroup of athletes, how well do these students do academically?

Bonnie MacKenzie
Student Affairs Research and Information
September 1981

"APPENDIX A"

GRADUATION RATES OF STUDENTS ADMITTED FROM HIGH SCHOOL

-By Sex-

A. Regularly Admitted Students

Entering Fall Quarter	n		Percent Graduating Within					
			4 years		5 years		6 years	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1968	988	1014	37	45	58	60	62	63
1969	866	969	41	48	63	64	68	66
1970	842	989	39	49	63	63	68	65
1971	951	843	37	44	60	59	66	60
1972	940	1007	39	39	63	58	68	62
1973	945	996	33	39	61	59	68	62
1974	952	1041	30	38	57	59		
1975	1041	1115	28	36				

B. Special Action Students

Entering Fall Quarter	n		Percent Graduating Within					
			4 years		5 years		6 years	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1968	68	55	28	18	44	35	47	44
1969	52	45	23	29	50	33	54	33
1970	38	29	21	21	40	38	40	45
1971	39	31	5	7	15	19	18	19
1972	63	51	19	8	29	24	29	26
1973	48	32	15	6	35	16	40	19
1974	59	39	17	3	31	21		
1975	59	60	7	13				